

African-American Churches “Walking In the Truth” for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention

Issue

“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.” *John 3:2*. Hearing this verse coming from the pulpit on any given Sunday would not seem unusual, but having a pastor demonstrate physical activity while saying it gives great impact for the congregation of Holy Comforter Reformed Episcopal Church of Cordesville, South Carolina.

Our state’s statistics are staggering:

- One out of every three African-Americans has hypertension and high cholesterol;
- More than 70 percent are overweight or obese;
- The diabetes rate is 80 percent higher in African-Americans than Caucasian adults; and
- Almost two out of every three African-Americans are either inactive or are not regularly active.

Intervention

The Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention (HDSP) Division of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) provides funding to the Community Health and Chronic Disease Prevention Program of the agency’s Public Health Region 7 to address HDSP priority areas. Region 7 decided to do this through training, and offering consultation and funding to African-American Churches. The Churches agreed to:

- Attend a “Walk in the Light” Training, designed to help churches create, expand or enhance a church health ministry and receive exciting tools to promote heart and stroke prevention through awareness of signs and symptoms, healthy eating and physical activity;
- Complete a “Walk in the Light” congregation assessment to assess the health and needs of the congregation;
- Host a Search Your Heart Congregation kickoff event;
- Host at least one monthly activity to teach and/or promote good health, eating fruits and vegetables;
- Implement at least one policy change in support of heart disease and stroke prevention; and
- Host a Go Red Sunday in February and Power to End Stroke – Power Sunday in May, to encourage awareness of heart disease and stroke.

Impact

In addition to Holy Comforter Reformed Episcopal Church, 16 other African-American churches became active “Search Your Heart” Churches in the three-county DHEC Region. This equates to approximately 6,800 parishioners being exposed to the connection between eating healthy and being physically active and “honoring God with your body” *Corinthians 6:20*. These churches expressed “honoring God with your body” by having:

- A Mother’s Day Celebration that included no fried food, several fruits and vegetables and no added salt;
- Weekly exercise classes and walking groups;
- A “Fruit Sunday” that involved fruit being distributed to 70 church members;
- Establishment of a Nurses Room for private consultation and for housing a materials library;
- A “Healthy Cooking” cook-off;
- “Health Minutes” read during the church service, added as bulletin inserts, and included in a Pastor’s Corner newsletter;
- Healthy meals from the American Heart Association cookbook, provided by the church’s Kitchen Committee;
- A “Walk a Church Member” initiative, with pedometers given for those who participated; and
- Fruit and water served as snacks for youth and church functions.

Contact: Karen Hill

S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control - Region 7
Community Health and Chronic Disease Prevention Program
(843) 953-4308; hillke@dhec.sc.gov